
Defense Report

AUSA



Will NATO Have Enough Time to React?

There has been much discussion about the growing preponderance of Soviet and Warsaw Pact conventional military power facing the NATO defenses in Western Europe. Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) has just issued a report predicting that the impact of those overpowering forces might be felt most in the form of reduced warning time prior to an attack into West Germany.

The Senator concludes the Soviets and their Warsaw Pact allies now have so much combat power available close to the most likely points of attack that they need not wait for a build-up of units from the Soviet Union and elsewhere. They could launch the attack across the West German border with hardly more than a few days' warning, rather than the weeks of preparatory build-up the NATO allies are counting on to provide a tip-off.

Some of the Senator's recommendations to improve the implementation of NATO's forward strategy involve the re-deployment of many NATO combat formations, including parts of some U. S. divisions now stationed west of the Rhine or far from the most likely route of attack across the North German plain. These deployments, the Senator hopes, would improve NATO's ability to "trade space for time" while reinforcements are brought up.

The report contains a recommendation for improved airlift to speed the introduction of reserves from Britain and from the United States. Through it all there is the conviction that any conventional attack into Western Europe by the Warsaw Pact nations would trigger a short, extremely violent war. Nowhere in the report is there any indication that the war might be fought with anything but the supplies and troops that are in place in Europe at the time the attack starts or are delivered in the first few days of fighting.

In establishing what is otherwise a well-supported scenario for the potential conflict Senator Nunn seems to have discarded the possibility that the NATO forces might bring the attackers to a stalemate, thereby shifting the drama into a second act—a prolonged series of attacks and counterattacks evolving into a protracted war. Reinforcements would begin to flow to the battlefield from Russia and across the Atlantic from the United States. Control of the seas and the availability of adequate sealift for U.S. reinforcements could provide the margin for eventual victory.

If the defense of NATO fails, the defeat will materialize within the first few days or weeks. If it stands against the initial onslaught its ultimate success will come months, or even years later. Our preparations must look beyond the "short war" scenario and toward the realistic need to form, equip and transport major forces for a long war.